

Special Feature

# Health Policies under Sejong: The King who Searched for the Way of Medicine

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## Introduction

The political ideology put forward by the new class of scholar-officials, the key players of the founding of Joseon, was based on neo-Confucianism. These figures attributed the fall of Goryeo to Buddhism and espoused the neo-Confucian political ideals of the Kingly Way (*wangdo* 王道) and benevolent governance. According to these elites, the premise of the Kingly Way of governance was the wise councilor assisting the king, and the scholar-officials were to be the backbone of neo-Confucian statecraft. Land and tax system reforms were undertaken as well to carry out the political ideal of loving the people (*aemin* 愛民) (Kim 2000, 14).

Various policies were implemented to fulfill the ideals of benevolent governance and loving the people, not least in the area of medicine. Medicine was particularly essential considering that benevolence and love meant guiding people towards the right way of life. Medical texts published between late Goryeo and early Joseon were the manifestation of a benevolent government as argued by the new class of scholar-officials (Yi 2002, 141-45), which is why the publication of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* (*Compendium of Korean Indigenous Medicinals and Prescriptions* 鄉藥集成方) during the reign of Sejong could be described as “benevolence realized through and through, up to the tiniest parts.”<sup>1</sup>

Under Sejong, the neo-Confucian political ideology gradually settled in Joseon as the area of medicine exemplifies. Taejong, Sejong’s predecessor, had poured his efforts into centralizing the authority of the throne, thus setting the stage for the wide range of brilliant academic achievements of Sejong’s reign including the extensive projects to compile medical texts, namely, *Hyangyak jipseongbang* and *Uibang yuchwi* (*Classified Collection of Medical Formulas* 醫方類聚). The reign of Sejong has been thus called the golden age of Joseon by scholars of the history of science and the history of medicine. Kim Dujong (1966, 206), a prominent scholar of the history of medicine writes that “[Sejong] left behind a great legacy that would later become the foundation of medicine in Joseon.”

A closer look into the field of medicine reveals just how diverse the achievements of Sejong were: in addition to the compilation of medical texts, he sought to systematize the delivery of health care focusing medical agencies

and restructure medical education as well as the examination system. Sejong’s devotion to academic pursuit made this possible, as a compiler of the Veritable Records (*sillok*) wrote,<sup>2</sup> but the influence of Taejong, who had expressed an interest in medicine several times, should not be overlooked. Taejong, however, tended to point out the problems of the issues at hand and take some measures against those, while Sejong took a more systemic approach, aiming to put into place a medical apparatus that befit the new dynasty.

The directions of the health policies Sejong implemented were largely twofold: in the study of medicine itself, standards were to be raised to advance the field as a whole, and medical practice was to be solidly grounded in medical texts. Beyond the area of medical studies, he sought to create a health system that reflected the centralized and powerful authority of the throne and better served the people. These aims were part of the overall direction of systematization Sejong’s policies reflect as well as his efforts to create a well-oiled system by minimizing the possibility of any corruption on the part of individuals.<sup>3</sup> The present article first examines how Sejong dealt with the problems existing in medicine and health care during his time by restructuring the health system and reinforcing the practice of medicine using indigenous medicinal ingredients. The article will then examine the path of medicine Sejong envisioned by looking at the compilation of *Uibang yuchwi* he undertook to in view of his vision of medicine.

## Healing Joseon’s Present

### *Efforts to Systematize*

With the founding of Joseon, Taejo sought to structure the ruling apparatus based on that of Goryeo.<sup>4</sup> The authority of the throne, however, did not fully

2. *Taejong sillok* 太宗實錄, *gwon* 35, 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1418.

3. Statecraft in Sejong’s reign can be defined by the increasing complexity of the state system and the subsequent prevention of individual corruption. The primary aim of the tribute tax law (*gongbeop* 貢法) on which the land and tax system was based was also to eliminate any possibility of corruption, which was one of the evils of taxation based on damage assessment of the land (*dapeom sonsilbeop* 踏驗損實法) (Kim 1983, 268-72). Another example is how the scholars of the Hall of Worthies was made to study the Classics and come up with measures to assess officials fairly (Park 2007, 35).

4. *Taejo sillok* 太祖實錄, *gwon* 1, 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1401.

1. Foreword of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* in *Sejong sillok* 世宗實錄, *gwon* 60, 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1433.

settle into place as evidenced by the first and second strife of the princes, and the task of newly establishing a ruling system appropriate to Joseon in place of the inherited systems of Goryeo was to put off amidst political unrest. Ironically, the efforts of Jeong Dojeon 鄭道傳, who had from the start envisioned a bureaucratic government based on neo-Confucian political ideology, came to fruition only after he was ousted from power by Taejong. A neo-Confucian, bureaucratic system gradually replaced the Buddhist, aristocratic system of Goryeo during the reign of Taejong and Sejong and become the de facto ruling system of Joseon.

The state's health system was organized accordingly along the same lines. When Joseon as a new dynasty was just coming into shape, the agencies in charge of medical service were the Palace Medical Office (Jeonuigam 典醫監; literally, "directorship of medicine") and the Public Dispensary (Hyeminguk 惠民局; literally, "office to benefit the people"). The former was an extremely comprehensive institution in charge of health policies in general, while the latter was a smaller agency that sold medicine and medical supplies to the people and examined them upon request. Such health facilities, however, needed to become more differentiated to adequately respond to the changing structures of the country; the outcome was the reorganization of the Public Infirmary (Hwarinwon 活人院; literally, "agency to save the people") and the establishment of the Relief Agency (Jesaengwon 濟生院; literally, "agency to save lives") (Kim 1966).

Considering this context, the installation of the Royal Medical Agency (Naeuiwon 內醫院; literally, "medical agency inside the palace") is of particular note. There had also been an agency exclusively attending to the medical needs of the royal family during Goryeo, namely, the Palace Dispensary (Sangyaguk 尙藥局; literally, "office in charge of medicine"), put into place by King Mokjong. The title and the composition of the Palace Dispensary continued to change depending on the political situation and was thus called Janguiseo 掌醫署 (literally, "division in charge of medical needs") and Bonguiseo 奉醫署 (literally, "division to serve royal medical needs") during King Chungseon, Sanguiguk 尙醫局 (literally, "office in charge of medicine") and then back to Bonguiseo again during King Gongmin, and finally become incorporated into Jeonuisi 典醫寺 (literally, "office of medicine") during King Gongyang (Lee 2010, 193-98). It was then called the Palace Pharmacy (Naeyakbang 內藥房) when Joseon was founded and belonged to the Palace Medical Office as it had

during Goryeo. The episode of Pyeong Wonhae 平原海 and Jo Cheong 曹聽, physicians of the Palace Pharmacy, being demoted to the Palace Medical Office in 1408,<sup>5</sup> however, indicate that the Palace Pharmacy was actually of a higher status than the Palace Medical Office since it treated the royal family including the king.

The neo-Confucianism view that saw the relationship between the ruler and his ministers as akin to that between parent and child, however, meant that the authority of the royal family needed further fortification. This is evident in the records of the discussion that took place in 1408 within the Department of the Censorate (Saheonbu 司憲府) surrounding the impeachment of Pyeong Wonhae for incorrectly preparing the medicinal decoction for the king. The relationship between ruler and minister is equated to that between father and son: "if the king is ill and must take his medicine, his ministers should taste it first, and if one's father is ill and must take his medicine, his son should taste it first, for medication must proceed with caution given the importance of one's king and one's father."<sup>6</sup>

Criticism was directed towards the physician's negligence; however, the real cause of the incident lay in the lack of a specialized agency and detailed procedures for exclusively providing medical service to the royal family. It was clear that the Palace Pharmacy, which was then still part of the Palace Medical Office, needed to be newly organized if it was to better serve its purposes. Consequently, it was reorganized into the Royal Medical Agency during Sejong's reign.

The Ministry of Personnel reported to the king, "the Palace Pharmacy 內藥房 handles extremely important affairs; yet, it is called a pharmacy, and the officials serving there do not have a title. This is a flaw continuing from the old system. We request that it henceforth be called the Royal Medical Agency 內醫院 and be equipped with 16 public officials, with those of the third rank being given the title Superintendent (*jegeo* 提舉), those of the sixth rank or higher, the title Special Appointee (*byeoljwa* 別坐), and those of the seventh rank or lower (*chamoe* 參外), the title Assistant Instructor (*jogyo* 助教)." The king granted this request.<sup>7</sup>

5. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon*16, 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1408.

6. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon*11, 5<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> lunar month, 1406.

7. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 100, 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1443.

Sejong accordingly established a Royal Medical Agency that was separate from the Palace Medical Office and would exclusively handle all things related to the health of the king and the royal family. Taejong's efforts to build a strong kingship was thus now manifesting in the health system, resulting in a measure that was both a bureaucratic restructuring as well as a proclamation of the sanctity of the royal family. Additionally, a separate pharmacy was created to serve the medical needs of high-ranking officials of the State Council (Uijeongbu 議政府) and the Six Ministries (Yukjo 六曹) despite the existence of the Palace Medical Office that already provided medical service for officials. Such rearrangements show how the health system was also gradually restructured to reflect the hierarchical bureaucratic system (S. Kim 2003, 65-67).

Meanwhile, systematic measures were taken to advance medical research and education. A good example is the creation of the system of the designating officials to read and study medical texts (*uiseo seupdokgwan* 醫書習讀官) (Kim 1998, 57-64). Physicians had already been continuously criticized for being unqualified since Taejong;<sup>8</sup> more importantly, though, new medical theories were now being imported from Ming.<sup>9</sup> These included the extremely intricate theories of the four masters of medicine of the Jin and Yuan eras 金元四大家,<sup>10</sup> and anyone who desired to properly understand them needed to have a systematic and accurate grasp of the principles of medicine. Sejong accordingly selected several figures among those who had passed the civil service examination and had them work at medical agencies to advance medical care.

The Ministry of Personnel reported to the king, "as for the practice of medicine, only those who have familiarized themselves with the principles of the waning and waxing of yin and yang and the generation and restriction among the five elements can diagnose illnesses and prescribe medicine. Many a good prescription of the past have come from the hands of literati physicians 儒醫; thus, erudite civil officials have at times also practiced medicine in the past. We request the additional appointment of

a widely read civil official to each of the following positions of Concurrent Medical Director (*jeonui gyeom jeong* 典醫兼正), Concurrent Vice Director (*gyeom bujeong* 兼副正), Concurrent Administrative Assistant (*gyeom pangwan* 兼判官), and Concurrent Clerk (*gyeom jubu* 兼主簿). For the Public Dispensary and the Relief Agency, we request the appointment of a learned, firm, upright, and diligent civil official to either the position of Superintendent (*jegeo* 提舉) or Special Appointee (*byeoljwa* 別坐), and to the position of Concurrent Assistant (*gyeom seung* 兼丞)." The king accepted this proposal.<sup>11</sup>

The proposal of the Ministry of Personnel was to appoint civil officials with medical knowledge to serve in medical agencies based on past precedents of literati physicians contributing to the advancement of medicine. These officials could be chosen out of the pool of talented individuals who had been charged with the aforementioned system of studying medical texts. The point to focus on here is that familiarizing themselves with medical books was not the end point for these individuals: there was also a system in place to ensure that they participate in clinical practice and directly contribute to advancing the field of medicine. From a practical point of view, it was an extremely innovative measure combining theory and clinical practice.

Sejong was also interested in medical education, as evident in his efforts to facilitate the studies of medical students (*uisaeng* 醫生) and reorganize the state examinations. In addition to the 50 and 30 medical students belonging to the Palace Medical Office and the Public Dispensary, respectively, each district was allocated between 8 to 14 medical students depending on the district's size. Sejong ordered the local magistrates to make sure these students could focus solely on their studies<sup>12</sup> and continued to see to it that they were supported throughout their studies. Sejong also took an interest in the medicine examination (*uigwa*), which was the last hurdle medical students had to get through to get appointed to a position upon finishing their education.

During the first miscellaneous examinations after Sejong ascended to the throne, 15 examinees passed the interpretation examination, 9 passed the astronomy examination, 9 passed the law examination, and 9 passed the

8. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 29, 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> lunar month, 1415; *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 35, 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1418.

9. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 34, 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1417. Taejong—Sejong may have been the one who came up with the mission—sent Yu Sundo 庾順道 to China to study medicine and buy medical texts.

10. For more on the medical theories of the four masters of medicine of Jin and Yuan, see Li and Liu 1982.

11. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 65, 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1434.

12. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 38, 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1427.

medicine examination.<sup>13</sup> Although it is not exactly clear what they were tested on or how these examinations were conducted, they were likely modeled on the examinations during Goryeo. In 1430 Sejong had the Office for the Establishment of Ceremonies (Sangjeongso 詳定所) define the texts that would be used for the miscellaneous examinations, which included 25 medical texts for the medicine examination.<sup>14</sup> These included books on medical theory such as *Nanjing* (*Classic of Difficult Issues* 難經) and *Suwen kuo* 素問括;<sup>15</sup> books on pulse diagnosis such as *Zhizhi mai* 直指脈, originally titled *Zhizhi fanglun maizhen jing* (*Ren Zhai's Treatise on the Direct Indication Formula* 直指方論脈真經), and *Zuantu mai* 纂圖脈, originally titled *Zuantu maijue* (*Redacted and Illustrated Pulse-taking Rhymes* 纂圖脈訣); books on acupuncture and moxibustion such as *Zhenjiu jing* 針灸經, originally titled *Zhenjiu shu* (*Book on Acupuncture and Moxibustion* 鍼灸書), and *Buzhu tongren jing* 補註銅人經, originally titled *Buzhu tongren shuxue zhenjiu tujing* (*Illustrated Manual of Acupuncture Points of a Tin Bronze Figure* 補註銅人脈穴鍼灸圖經); obstetrics and gynecology books such as *Furen daquan* 婦人大全, originally titled *Furen daquan liangfang* (*Compendium of Superior Formulas for Women* 婦人大全良方); books on cold-related illnesses such as *Shanghan leishu* 傷寒類書, originally titled *Shanghan leishu huoren zongkuo* (*Book on Cold Disorders* 傷寒類書活人總括);<sup>16</sup> books on medicinal ingredients such as *Yanyi bencao* 衍義本草, originally titled *Bencao yanyi* (*Elucidation of the Meanings of Materia Medica* 本草衍義); books listing various medical theories and prescriptions such as *Qianjin yifang* (*Supplement to Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold Pieces* 千金翼方) and *Shengji zonglu* (*Complete Record of Sagely Benevolence* 聖濟總錄); and veterinary medicine books such as *Uma uibang* 牛馬醫方.<sup>17</sup> The list of books encompassed practically all existing fields of medicine,<sup>18</sup> and it is worth noting that *Hyangyak jipseongbang*

was included in this list as well.<sup>19</sup> In short, examinees were encouraged to study *Hyangyak jesaeng jipseongbang* (*Compendium of Korean Indigenous Medicinals and Prescriptions compiled by the Relief Agency* 鄉藥濟生集成方) in addition to mastering all the theoretically required areas, taking into account the practical limitations in obtaining medicinal ingredients in Joseon.

Finally, a stronger emphasis was placed on the aspect of medicine as serving the people during Sejong's reign. This role had continued to be carried out by the Public Dispensary and the Relief Agency. In particular, the Public Dispensary, the brainchild of Jeong Dojeon during the early years of Joseon, was a typical example of a medical agency geared towards serving the public that focused on providing mainly locally sourced medicine at an affordable price. It was initially designed to be financially sustained by a fund Jeong Dojeon had created while making only minimal profit.<sup>20</sup> The price of medicine needed to be kept steady at an affordable price, however, which inevitably raised the issue of developing indigenous medicinal ingredients to replace the more expensive imported ingredients.

Sejong astutely grasped that the linchpin in providing medical care for the people was the price of medicine. In 1440, he judged that the medicine sold from the Public Dispensary were expensive and subsequently had the prices adjusted, with the exception of the Clear Heart Pill 清心元, Liquid Styrax Pill 蘇合元, and Life Preservation Elixir 保命丹,<sup>21</sup> which used highly expensive imported medicinal ingredients including Moschus 麝香, Cinnabaris 朱砂, Aquillariae Lignum 沉香, Styrax Liquides 蘇合油, and Borneolum 龍腦.<sup>22</sup> Medicine such as the Clear Heart Pill and the Liquid Styrax Pill were widely used during then, but Sejong made it a point to exclude them from price adjustments as it was virtually

13. *Sejongillok*, gwon 3, 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1418.

14. *Sejongillok*, gwon 47, 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lunar month, 1430.

15. Presumed to refer to *Suwen* 素問, originally titled *Huangdi neijing suwen* (*Basic Question of the Yellow Emperor's Inner Cannon* 黃帝內經 素問).

16. Also known as *Renzhai shanghan leishu* 仁齋傷寒類書.

17. Presumed to refer to *Sinpyeon jipseong mauibang* (*Newly Compiled Compendium of Diseases and Treatments of Horses* 新編集成馬醫方).

18. Studying such an extensive list of medical texts was no easy task. In *Gyeongguk daejeon* (*State Code* 經國大典), the list was shortened to the following texts: *Zuantu mai* 纂圖脈, *Tongren jing* 銅人經, originally titled *Xinzhong tongren shuxue zhenjiu tujing* (*Illustrated Manual of Acupuncture Points of a Newly Cast Bronze Figure* 新鑄銅人脈穴鍼灸圖經), *Zhizhi fang* 直指方, originally titled *Renzhai*

*Zhizhi fang* (*Renzhai's Straightforward Directions on Formulas* 仁齋直指方), *Dexiao fang* 得效方, originally titled *Shiyi Dexiao fang* (*Efficacious Remedies of the Physicians* 世醫得效方), *Furen daquan* 婦人大全, *Changjinjip* (*Book on Smallpox and Measles* 瘡疹集), *Taesang jibyo* (*Book of Obstetrics* 胎產集要), *Gugeupbang* (*Emergency Remedies* 救急方), *Heji fang* 和劑方, originally titled *Taiping huimin heji jufang* (*Great Peace Imperial Pharmacy's Formulary* 太平惠民和劑局方), *Bencao* (*Materia Medica* 本草), and *Gyeongguk daejeon*.

19. *Hyangyak jipseongbang* here refers to *Hyangyak jesaeng jipseongbang*: the former was published in 1433 while the latter was published in 1399.

20. "Hyemin jeonyakguk" (Pharmacy for the Benefit of the People 惠民典藥局), in *bujeon* 賦典 of vol. 1 of *Joseon gyeongguk daejeon* 朝鮮經國典 上; *Sambongjip* (*Collected Works of Jeong Dojeon* 三峰集), gwon 13.

21. *Sejongillok*, gwon 90, 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1440.

22. *Sejongillok*, gwon 29, 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1425.

impossible for the people to afford them anyway. In addition, since the high demand for such medicines could also trigger the circulation of cheap, defective products, Sejong prohibited these medicines from being arbitrarily prepared or sold from venues other than the pharmacies of the Palace Medical Office, the Public Dispensary, or the State Council, or by local governors.<sup>23</sup>

Before these measures bearing on medicine prices were enacted, however, a notable entry appears in the records:

The State Council reported, “since medicine is originally meant to relieve the people from illness and thus is extremely important, the state has appointed medical officials early on, created a fund (*bo* 寶) for revenue, and sold medicine to prevent the people from dying prematurely...the sales of medicine and the resulting profit has been very low in many agencies, and consequently the fund has been making less and less profit by the day. This is hardly desirable.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite the creation of a fund called *bo* to subsidize the selling of medicine at an affordable price, the sales were not enough to make a profit, resulting in the increasing depletion of the fund. In other words, the sales needed to be high enough to maintain the fund, which was what made it possible for people to buy medicine at inexpensive prices. Sejong recognized accurately that the fund could be sustained—and ultimately maximize the benefits it provided the people—only by making large sales of the medicine in demand. Facilitating the supply of medicinal ingredients consequently became crucial, and this led to the reemergence of the discourse surrounding the importance of the practice of medicine using native medicinal ingredients, a topic that had been widely discussed since late Goryeo. Texts such as *Hyangyak chaechwi wollyeong* (*Guidebook for Collecting Local Medicinals* 鄉藥採取月令), which explicated the collecting of and formulas using local medicinal ingredients, and *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, a comprehensive medical text comprising prescriptions using only local medicinal ingredients, were thus published amidst such efforts to maximize the use of locally sourced medicine in order to continue providing medical service to the people.

To sum up, the health policies during the reign of Sejong proceeded largely in three directions. The first was the creation of the Royal Medical Agency and operation of a pharmacy for high-ranking officials so that medical care could be provided in a way that was compatible with a bureaucratic system centralized around a powerful kingship. The second was the creation of a system of selecting civil officials who were to study medical books and subsequently lead medical research, and the reorganization of the medical education and state examination system through which qualified medical personnel could be trained and appointed. Finally, the third was the efforts to make medical care more accessible to the people, and the specific policies to more efficiently procure the needed medicinal ingredients to that end.

### *Korean Medicinal Ingredients*

The development and production of domestic medicinal ingredients and the expansion of effective prescriptions using them was absolutely necessary to continue to provide affordable medical care to the people. Using medicinal ingredients produced in Joseon was a good alternative in face of the high prices attached to imported Chinese ingredients. At the same time, Sejong clearly understood that he could not simply order locally sourced ingredients to be put into immediate use given their medicinal properties and thus sought a step-by-step approach instead. The measures he put into place proceeded sequentially in the following order: the verification of medicinal ingredients sourced from Joseon, the distribution of these verified ingredients, securing the basis for the production of local medicinal ingredients, and the publication of a comprehensive medical text based on these medicinal ingredients.

The first step was the verification of the medicinal ingredients produced in Joseon, that is, the task of comparing their medicinal properties with those of Chinese medicinal ingredients. Physicians entrusted with this task were sent to China along with the group of envoys. There, they worked with Chinese physicians to verify in person the medicinal ingredients they had brought along. These missions were carried out twice during Sejong’s reign—in the years 1423 and 1430—and a third attempt was planned in 1427 but ultimately unexecuted. No Jungrye 盧重禮, one of Sejong’s favorite physicians and the main force behind the publication of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* in 1433, was among the physicians who accompanied or were to accompany the envoys to

23. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 91, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1440.

24. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 77, 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1437.

China each time. His reports following the verification process were recorded in the Veritable Records and show just how meticulously it was conducted.

Sejong had all local medicinal ingredients produced throughout the country sent to the central government before the physicians took them to China. For instance, around a fortnight before the envoys including the physicians were to depart for China in 1427, Sejong issued an ordinance to all local magistrates across the country.

The king issued the following decree to each province: “have the medical instructors (*gyoyu* 教諭) gather the medicinal ingredients produced in each village and send the flowers, leaves, stem, and roots [to the central government], taking care not to damage them.”<sup>25</sup>

Unlike tribute tax or tribute sent to the palace, during which only the parts actually used as medicine were usually culled and sent, Sejong had the medical instructors send the undamaged herbs in their entirety including the flowers and leaves, presumably to provide accurate information to the Chinese physicians for the verification process. Although no such records exist for the envoys sent in 1423 and 1430, we can nevertheless conjecture that the same procedure was undertaken.

These medicinal ingredients were then verified in China by Joseon and Chinese physicians. The most high-ranking physicians of China typically participated in this exchange. The physicians sent from Joseon in 1430 were able to meet Zhou Yongzhong 周永中 and Gao Wenzhong 高文中, physicians of the Great Medical Office (*Tai yi yuan* 太醫院), and ask them questions in person. Records show how carefully the Joseon government prepared for this meeting. The envoys reported the results upon their return back to Joseon, which were then used to determine which of the domestic medicinal ingredients would be used. For instance, the entry for 1423 reads as follows:

Kim Eulhyeon 金乙玄, the Grand Military Protector (*daehogun* 大護軍), No Jungrye, the Vice Director of the Office of Palace Kitchen Supplies (*sajaebujeong* 司宰副正), and Bak Yeon 朴堧, the former instructor (*jeon gyosugwan* 前教授官) visited the Ming court, and out of the 62 kinds of

medicinal ingredients grown in Joseon, inquired about the ones that were different from those produced in China. After comparing 14 varieties including *Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix* 丹蔘, *Echinopsis Radix* 漏蘆, *Bupleuri Radix* 柴胡, *Sinomeni Caulis et Rhizoma* 防己, *Akebiae Caulis* 木通, *Asteris Radix* 紫堇, *Clematidis Radix* 葳靈仙, *Ampelopsis Radix* 白斂, *Magnoliae Cortex* 厚朴, *Cnidii Rhizoma* 芎藭, *Tetrapanacis Medulla* 通草, *Angelicae Tenuissimae Radix* 藁本, *Araliac Continentalis Radix* 獨活, and *Sparganii Rhizoma* 京三陵, 6 were newly verified as authentic. *Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix*, *Sinomeni Caulis et Rhizoma*, *Magnoliae Cortex*, *Asteris Radix*, *Cnidii Rhizoma*, *Tetrapanacis Medulla*, *Araliac Continentalis Radix*, and *Sparganii Rhizoma* were confirmed to be different from those produced in China and were ordered not to be used henceforth.<sup>26</sup>

The entry shows how the use of medicinal ingredients the physicians identified as being different from Chinese varieties such as *Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix* and *Sinomeni Caulis et Rhizoma* were prohibited accordingly.<sup>27</sup> A ban on their usage as medicine, however, did not mean that these ingredients were no longer subject to additional verification. The physicians who accompanied the envoys to China in 1430 reported that among the medicinal ingredients banned in 1423, *Magnoliae Cortex* and *Araliac Continentalis Radix* were reassessed to be equivalent to Chinese medicinals, and that *Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix* and *Asteris Radix* were could not be verified.<sup>28</sup> This means that domestic medicinal ingredients that had already been confirmed as being different from Chinese ones and consequently banned were put through the verification process again; new results had shown up, thanks to continuous efforts to discover different indigenous species from those previously sent to China in 1423.

There seem to have been no further verification expeditions after 1430, judging from the absence of any relevant records after this. The verification of domestic medicinal ingredients, in other words, was complete. A short booklet titled *Hyangyak chaechwi wolbyeong* was published during the following year of 1431. Figures including Yu Hyotong 兪孝通, Second Deputy Director (*jikjehak* 直提學) of the Hall of Worthies (*Jipyeonjeon* 集賢殿), No Jungrye, Director

26. *Sejongillok, gwon* 19, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lunar month, 1423.

27. *Sejongillok, gwon* 19, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lunar month, 1423.

28. *Sejongillok, gwon* 48, 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1430.

25. *Sejongillok, gwon* 37, 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1427.

of the Palace Medical Office (Jeonuigam *jeong* 典醫監正), and Bak Yundeok 朴允德, Vice Director of the Palace Medical Office (Jeonuigam *bujeong* 典醫監副正) started working on its compilation from 1428. Among them, No Jungrye was the one who had been continuously sent to China to participate in the verification process in person. These three figures also made the most of their expertise during the compilation of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* later in 1433.

*Hyangyak chaechwi wollyeong* lists the Chinese and Korean names of 153 varieties of medicinal ingredients arranged into 13 categories according to their harvesting periods: 12 categories, from the first to the twelfth lunar month, and an additional category for those with variable harvesting times. The booklet was a means to distribute the results of the verification process to those in charge of harvesting domestic medicinal ingredients. For instance, both *Araliac Continentalis Radix*, listed under the second lunar month, and *Elsholtzia* 香薷, listed under the tenth lunar month, had been verified and authorized for usage. Several ingredients whose verification had been postponed, however, such as *Asteris Radix*, listed under the fifth lunar month, were also included.<sup>29</sup> *Hyangyak chaechwi wollyeong* was mainly geared towards medicinal harvesters who could understand the contents without any other information besides the names of the medicinal herbs.

The next step following the verification of the medicinal ingredients and the distribution of the results was to actually put this knowledge to use. To that end, Sejong sought to secure the supply of local medicinal ingredients. The compilation of the *Jiriji* (*Geographic Treatise* 地理志) is a case in point. The *Sejong sillok jiriji* (*Geographic Treatise of the Veritable Records of King Sejong*) is regarded to have been compiled starting from 1425 and finished in 1432. While the stated focus of the book was the clarification of the chronological history and changes of local administrative units, the main objective was in fact a detailed survey of the present state of the country. The contents, which included specific figures of taxable land, the number of households, as well as special regional products, was in essence a basic database allowing the central government to exert power over the local areas more efficiently (Jeong 1976).

29. Most of the research on *Hyangyak chaechwi wollyeong* has been conducted in the field of Korean languages and literature. See, for example, Nam 1981 and H. Kim 2001, 2002, 2003. To date there are no studies done within the field of the history of medicine. More detailed comparative studies centered on the verification and distribution of medicinal ingredients produced in Korea are needed.

Having an overall picture of the current economic situation across the country was absolutely necessary in order to meet the state's administrative, financial, and military needs. A survey of specific medicinal ingredients produced in each region was detailed under sections titled as Local Products 土宜, Local Tributes 土貢, and Medicinal Ingredients 藥材. For example, the book recorded that medicinal ingredients such as *Saposhnikovia Radix* 防風, *Sepiae Os* 烏魚骨, *Liriopsis Tuber* 麥門冬, *Asparagi Tuber* 天門冬, *Mume Fructus Praeparatum Alba* 鹽梅, and *Mume Fructus Praeparatum* 烏梅 were produced in Ulsan-gun, a remote area in Gyeongsang province. These medicinal ingredients were then collected as part of the tax system and subsequently supplied to medical facilities in charge of handling them such as the Public Dispensary or the Relief Agency.

These steps of verifying domestic medicinal ingredients, distributing the resulting information, and securing the basis of their production were implemented sequentially during virtually the same period. The final step was the compilation of *Hyangyak jipseongbang*. As mentioned before, the individuals who had taken part in compiling *Hyangyak chaechwi wollyeong* such as Yu Hyotong were again put in charge. The project of compiling *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, which eventually amounted to 85 volumes, began in the autumn of 1431.

In the fall of 1431, the king ordered Yu Hyotong, Second Deputy Director of the Hall of Worthies, No Jungrye, Director of the Palace Medical Office, and Bak Yundeok, Vice Director of the Palace Medical Office to again thoroughly consult many other medical texts listing local medicinal prescriptions and accordingly add the [missing] information to their corresponding categories...1,476 items of acupuncture and moxibustion methods, and the materia medica as well as medicinal preparation methods were appended, and the completed 85 volumes were presented to the king.<sup>30</sup>

Some opposed the compilation of another medical text on medicine using native ingredients when a substantial one—*Hyangyak jesaeng jipseongbang*—had already been published in 1399. For instance, Hwang Jahu 黃子厚, Superintendent (*jejo* 提調) of the Palace Medical Office, objected 10 days before the completion of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* that even *Hyangyak jesaeng*

30. Foreword in *Hyangyak jipseongbang*.



*jipseongbang* was already too complicated<sup>31</sup> and argued instead for the more practical alternative of distributing *Gugeupbang* (*Emergency Remedies* 救急方).<sup>32</sup>

To put it differently, the officials working in medicine including Hwang Jahu had no problem with continuing to provide medical care to the people by using medical books such as *Gugeupbang*. Sejong, however, disagreed and instead wished for *Hyangyak jipseongbang* to assume the form of a complete medical text in itself. He thus had the section covering disease symptoms and their treatments expanded extensively: according to Gwon Chae 權採, who wrote the foreword for *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, there were 959 symptoms and 10,706 treatments listed in *Hyangyak jipseongbang* compared to the 338 symptoms and 2,803 treatments in *Hyangyak jesaeng jipseongbang*, which would mean a nearly three-fold increase in the number of symptoms and a four-fold increase in the number of treatments covered.

Sejong's desire for *Hyangyak jipseongbang* to be a comprehensive medical text, albeit in conflict with the opinions of Hwang Jahu and other medical officials, likely influenced the writing of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* to a large degree (Kim 2015, 171). Although no records confirm this exactly, it is highly possible considering Sejong's plans of *Uibang yuchwi* later. Furthermore, the fact that *Hyangyak jipseongbang* contained a vast amount of medical theories compared to the number of those included in *Hyangyak jesaeng jipseongbang*, and that most of these theories were from *Taiping shenghuifang* (*Great Peace and Sagely Benevolence Formulas* 太平聖惠方) and *Shengji zonglu* 聖濟總錄, both of which faithfully reflecting the neo-Confucian political ideology of the Song dynasty, also suggest the influence of neo-Confucian universalism by which Sejong sought to rule the country.<sup>33</sup>

*Hyangyak jipseongbang* was also important as a medical textbook for education purposes within Sejong's schema of placing locally sourced medicine at the core of the entire health system. Regions beyond the capital where Chinese medicinal ingredients were hard to come by were naturally highly

dependent on local medicinal ingredients, which in turn made the distribution of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* to these areas all the more necessary. Ordinances bearing on the health system and medical education were subsequently issued to local magistrates. For example, Sejong issued an order to the governors of Pyeongan and Hamgyeong provinces in 1433 specifying that medical instructors should gather local medicinal ingredients and verify whether they can be used or not.<sup>34</sup> These medical instructors, as officials posted to each province who were in charge of providing medical education to the students, were the ones likely to disseminate medical theories predicated on local medicinal ingredients. In 1442, *Hyangyak jipseongbang* is mentioned as an important text among the medical textbooks sent to a newly established village in Hamgil province to use for educating students.<sup>35</sup>

*Hyangyak jipseongbang* was important for the state's health policies for several reasons. Not only did the contents prove useful for procuring the needed medicinal ingredients, but it also contributed to resolving the shortage of medical personnel to some extent. Most of the medical theory section of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* was constituted by *Taiping shenghuifang*, thus limiting its potential to encompass more advanced medical theories; yet at the same time, this had the advantage of ensuring pedagogical consistency in the medical theories taught to future medical officials.

In sum, Sejong actively advocated the use of domestic medicinal ingredients to better provide medical care to the people, one of the vital tasks of the times. The verification of medicinal ingredients was in full swing starting from 1423 and was producing results in various areas during the early 1430s. Projects such as medicinal verification, the pre-compilation survey of *Jiriji*, and the compilation of *Hyangyak chaechwui wollyeong* and *Hyangyak jipseongbang* were the outcomes of the implementation of a consistent, step-by-step process: verifying medicinal ingredients produced in Joseon, distributing this information, securing the base of the production of local medicinal ingredients, and compiling a comprehensive medical text. Sejong's plans however were not over with the realization of a domestic-ingredients-based medicine and health care. He had a larger vision.

31. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 60, 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1433.

32. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 37, 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1427.

33. According to Kim Namil (1999, 196), out of the total of 5,652 entries in *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, 410 entries (7.25%) are from *Shengji zonglu* and 1,304 entries (23%) are from *Taiping shenghuifang*. Both *Shengji zonglu* and *Taiping shenghuifang* together amount to almost 30% of *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, which cites over 200 medical texts in total, indicating that the proportion of these two medical texts is far bigger than the others.

34. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 62, 12<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1433.

35. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 95, 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> lunar month, 1442.

## Preparing for the Future

### *The Birth of Uibang yuchwi*

The desire for new medical knowledge and medical texts predates Sejong. It was particularly strong during his predecessor, Taejong, who had all the medical texts stored in the Office of State Records (Chunchugwan 春秋館; literally, Spring and Autumn Office) moved to the Palace Pharmacy in 1412,<sup>36</sup> presumably to place them under more intensive care. In the tenth month of the same year, Taejong sent medical experts along with experts in the study of music 樂學 and interpretation 譯學 to China to discuss ways of learning,<sup>37</sup> and in 1415, he requested envoys going to China to obtain the *Zhenjiu shu* 鍼灸書 and *Tongren tu* 銅人圖.<sup>38</sup> In 1417, he appointed Yu Sundo 庾順道 as a secretary (*seojanggwan* 書狀官) and had him accompany the envoys going to Beijing in order to further study medicine and purchase medical texts.<sup>39</sup>

The envoys to China (Saeunsa 謝恩使; literally, envoy to China for expressing gratitude for imperial benevolence) returned five months later and presented the king with medical texts and medicinal ingredients bought from Beijing.<sup>40</sup> Yu Sundo, the secretary appointed the year before, had probably purchased the texts, though no records exist on whether he studied medicine in Beijing or how long he stayed there. Still, the records mentioned so far make it clear that the desire for new medical knowledge and medical texts up to Ming, which were centered on the theories of the four masters of medicine of Jin and Yuan, was already a strong presence during Taejong's reign, even before manifesting as the project to compile medical texts such as *Uibang yuchwi* during Sejong's reign.

A glimpse of Sejong's commitment towards the compilation of *Uibang yuchwi* can be seen in the entry on the close reading and studying of medical texts that took place during the third year of Sejong's reign.

The king was worried that physicians were not devoting themselves to their studies and ordered a few people, including former Superintendent Yi Hyoji 李孝之, to read medical texts inside the palace for the first time.<sup>41</sup>

This entry is generally understood as the first record demonstrating the enactment of the system of designating officials to read and study medical texts. As evident above, Sejong's concern over the unsatisfactory state of medical studies was the driving factor behind its creation. This *uiseo seupdokgwan* system resulted in the production of a large number of officials equipped with medical knowledge. An entry during Danjong's reign writes that the recommendation to read and study medical texts was what equipped Yi Hyosin 李孝信, Jeon Sunui 全循義, and Kim Ji 金智 with medical knowledge.<sup>42</sup> Although only Yi Hyoji is mentioned, Jeon Sunui and Kim Ji likely participated in the reading of medical texts as well given the reference to "a few people."

Yi Hyoji, one of the figures assigned to studying medical texts, has an interesting family background that is worth noting here. He was the third son of Yi Maengsang 李孟常, who had four sons that all passed the civil service examination during Sejong's reign: Yi Gyeomji 李謙之, Yi Sunji 李純之, Yi Hyoji, and Yi Jeonji 李全之 (Park and Oh 2018, 307-08). Yi Sunji was a scholar who studied astronomy and the calendrical system as per Sejong's orders and wrote *Chiljeongsan* (*Calculation of the Motions of the Seven Luminaries* 七政算) together with Jeong Inji 鄭麟趾 and Jeong Cho 鄭招. Yi Ye 李芮, Yi Jeonji's son, was a scholar of the Hall of Worthies who participated in the writing of the *Goryeosa jeoryo* (*Essentials of the History of Goryeo* 高麗史節要), and more importantly in terms of this article participated in the second stage of the editing of *Uibang yuchwi*.

To have so many family members engaging in specialized fields of study such as astronomy or medicine is extremely unusual. The fact that Yi Ye, whose uncle Yi Hyoji had in turn been assigned to study medical texts, participated in the editing of *Uibang yuchwi* appears to be part of Sejong's continuous efforts to create a group of specialists. The participation of Jeon Sunui and Kim Yuji, who

36. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 24, 12<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1412.

37. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 24, 26<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1412.

38. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 29, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1415.

39. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 34, 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1417.

40. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 35, 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1418.

41. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 11, 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1421.

42. *Danjong sillok* 端宗實錄, *gwon* 13, 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> lunar month, 1455. "Yi Hyosin," as written in the records appear to be a misprint of Yi Hyoji 李孝之, and "Kim Ji" appears to refer to Kim Yuji 金有智, who participated in the compilation of *Uibang yuchwi*.

had also been appointed to study medical texts, in compiling *Uibang yuchwi* further suggest the influence of Sejong's intentions, although no records exist to corroborate this.

The birth of *Uibang yuchwi*, marking the zenith of the compilation of medical texts and Sejong's efforts to advance medicine, was the result of meticulous planning and preparation on Sejong's part. Why else would Sejong have focused his efforts into compiling another medical text only 12 years after the comprehensive medical text *Hyangyak jipseongbang* had been compiled in 1433? *Hyangyak jipseongbang* then was not the end point of the medical text compilation projects Sejong had planned: we should instead direct our focus towards *Uibang yuchwi*. Unfortunately, the records on the compilation of *Uibang yuchwi* are exceptionally rare.

The king ordered Kim Yemong 金禮蒙, Assistant Second Drafter (*bugyori* 副校理) of the Hall of Worthies, Yu Seongwon 柳誠源, First Copyist (*jeojangnang* 著作郎), and Min Bohwa 閔普和, a fifth-rank military officer (*sajik* 司直), to gather many medical texts, define the categories of the illnesses, classify [the contents of the medical texts], and compile them into a single book. The king then ordered Kim Mun 金汶 and Sin Seokjo 辛碩祖, Second Deputy Directors of the Hall of Worthies, Yi Ye, Assistant Second Drafter, and Kim Suon 金守溫, Second Drafter of the Office of Diplomatic Correspondence (*seungmunwon gyori* 承文院校理) to gather the medical officials Jeon Sunui, Choe Yun 崔潤, and Kim Yuji and have them do the editing. The king then ordered Yi Yong 李瑢, the Grand Prince Anpyeong 安平大君, Yi Sacheol 李思哲, Chief Royal Secretary (*doseungji* 都承旨), Yi Sasun 李師純, Assistant Royal Secretary (*ubuseungji* 右副承旨), and No Jungrye, Second Deputy Director of the Advisory Council (*cheomji jungchuwonsa* 僉知中樞院事) to review. After three years, the total of 365 volumes were completed. The king bestowed upon it the title *Uibang yuchwi*.<sup>43</sup>

Until recently, this 1455 entry in which *Uibang yuchwi* first appears had been seen as indicating the completion of the process begun in 1442. More recent studies, however, convincingly suggest that this entry is actually announcing the start of the project: Yi Sacheol is appointed as Chief Royal

Secretary in the ninth lunar month of 1447 while Yi Sasun is appointed as Assistant Royal Secretary in the fourth lunar month of that year, which indicates that the compilation of *Uibang yuchwi* was completed after the ninth lunar month of 1447 at the earliest (Lee 2017, 5-7).

In addition, during this month, the new appointment of Im Wonjun 任元濬, the junior seventh-rank military official (*busajeong* 副司正) who had been one of the compilers of the medical texts, causes some trouble when it turns out to have been related to his ties with Hwang Susin 黃守身, who had been serving as Chief Royal Secretary.<sup>44</sup> No medical texts besides *Uibang yuchwi* were compiled during this time, hence we can assume that the compilation mentioned in this entry is related to the compilation of *Uibang yuchwi*. The same entry also mentions that Sejong orders the medical text compilers to be given a higher rank, which indicates that the compilation work was more or less in its final stages. In short, we can reasonably conjecture that *Uibang yuchwi* started to be compiled in the tenth lunar month of 1445 and was completed no earlier than some time after the ninth month of 1447.

Needless to say, the project's significance is no less regardless of whether it actually took place three years later than what has been generally believed. But why did Sejong have 365 volumes compiled again after publishing the 85 volumes of *Hyangyak jipseongbang*? Unfortunately, none of the remaining records we have at the present write of the exact circumstances behind this, nor does *Uibang yuchwi* have a foreword or afterword providing us with a clear answer. The latter point particularly contrasts with how the foreword of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* was even recorded in the Veritable Records, which I will discuss later in this article. Let us first examine some of the aspects more directly related to the compilation of *Uibang yuchwi*.

Kim Yemong, Yu Seongwon, and Min Bohwa, who belonged to the Hall of Worthies, were among the figures involved during the initial stages of the compilation. Only these three names are specifically mentioned in the records, although it is safe to assume that many more people were involved. One hint, for instance, is the record stating that the 74 people involved in the proofreading process were punished in 1464 on the charge of the many errors discovered in *Uibang yuchwi*.<sup>45</sup> These many people working on the proofreading, with the

43. *Sejongillok, gwon* 110, 27<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1445.

44. *Sejongillok, gwon* 117, 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1447.

45. *Sejoillok* 世祖實錄, *gwon* 32, 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> lunar month, 1464.

proofreading already in its fifth year at this point,<sup>46</sup> in other words, suggests that the number of people participating in the compilation from the start would have been at least more than 74, especially considering that the compilation was complete in only three years.

According to the 1445 entry quoted above, the compilation of *Uibang yuchwi* was carried out in three stages in total. The first and second stages were led by the scholars of the Hall of Worthies, who, with their long experience of working on many other compilations under their belt, consulted various texts through research of previous systems of the past (Han 1992). Both Kim Yemong and Yu Seongwon, participants of the first stage, had worked on the compilation of *Goryeosa jeoryo*;<sup>47</sup> Kim Mun, who participated in the second stage, had been a compiler during the writing of *Tonggam hunui* (*Explanation of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* 通鑑訓義) in 1435;<sup>48</sup> both Yi Ye and Sin Seokjo, who were also part of the second stage, had been involved in the compilation of *Goryeosa jeoryo* as well; and Yi Sacheol, who participated during the third stage, had worked on the compilation of *Tonggam hunui*.

Specialists from a variety of fields also participated in the project. For example, Kim Yemong, who had studied Chinese along with Sin Seokgyeon 辛石堅 and Nam Sumun 南秀文 at the Office of Interpretators (Sayeokwon 司譯院), was put in charge of the first stage.<sup>49</sup> A frequently mentioned feature of *Uibang yuchwi* is its summarization of the study of medicine after the four masters of medicine of the Jin and Yuan eras, and Kim Yemong's knowledge in Chinese likely came in handy in reviewing medical texts spanning many eras and the constantly evolving writings styles throughout time.

The complication proceeded along certain rules. There is no mention of medical officials participating during the first stage, which is described as gathering related texts, and then defining the categories and grouping the contents according to them (*bunmun yuchwi* 分門類聚). The work therefore likely involved reading each medical text and preliminarily classifying the contents according to each disease category 病門. The second stage involved

many physicians in addition to Yi Ye, who was well read in medicine,<sup>50</sup> which suggested that they would have been in charge of reexamining, correcting, and/or supplementing the categorization work done during the first stage. Finally, No Jungrye, the most brilliant medical official during Sejong's reign as well as the main figure of the compilation of *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, participated in the third stage for the final review.

The outcome of this work was the completion of 365-volume medical text titled *Uibang yuchwi*. If one considers the state-led compilation of the renowned medical texts of the Song dynasty of China, *Taiping shenghuifang* and *Shengji zonglu*, each amounting to 100 volumes and 200 volumes, respectively, this compilation of *Uibang yuchwi* under Sejong may well be considered the largest project in all of East Asia at that time.<sup>51</sup> The entire text undergoes proofreading under Sejo, and a total of 30 sets of 266 volumes (*gwon*) of 264 books (*chaek*) each are published in 1477 under Seongjong.<sup>52</sup> The printed version of *Uibang yuchwi* is arranged into 91 categories 門, with the contents under each category organized in the order of Theory 理論, Preparation of Medicine according to Formula 方藥, Dietary Remedies 食治, Contraindications 禁忌, Acupuncture and Moxibustion 鍼灸, and Physical Movement, Mediation, and Deep Breathing Exercises 導引. *Uibang yuchwi* encompasses Chinese medical texts from the Tang dynasty up to early Ming, as well as the achievements of Korean traditional medicine from late Goryeo to early Joseon, and has been thus regarded as a comprehensive medical text extensively surveying the most advanced medicine during that period.<sup>53</sup>

### *The Desirable Path of Medicine*

Three years of hard work bear fruit in the completion of *Uibang yuchwi*. Why then is *Uibang yuchwi* not published right away? This is all the more curious when compared to the case of *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, where a foreword was even commissioned around the time the title was decided upon and publication

46. *Sejo sillok*, *gwon* 18, 30<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1459.

47. *Munjong sillok* 文宗實錄, *gwon* 12, 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> lunar month, 1452.

48. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 68, 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1435.

49. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 63, 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> lunar month, 1434.

50. Yim Wonjun probably also participated in the second stage.

51. See Ahn, Kim, and Jo 2016, for more discussion on the research on *Uibang yuchwi* in Korea, China, and Japan. According to this study, a total of 126 books and articles have been published on *Uibang yuchwi* until 2016, which shows the high level of interest in the subject.

52. *Seongjong sillok*, 成宗實錄, *gwon* 80, 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1477.

53. See Lee 2017 for an overall discussion of the compilation and contribution of *Uibang yuchwi*.

was imminent.<sup>54</sup> Of course, one has to consider the extensive volume of *Uibang yuchwi*—amounting to more than four times of that of *Hyangyak jipseongbang*—and the long proofreading process that took place throughout the reigns of Sejo and Seongjong, not to mention the obstacles to getting it published including the punishment of many officials during the proofreading stage. At the same time, though, it was not the first time compiling and publishing a medical text—the compilation of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* had been successfully pulled off.

Despite not being published immediately, *Uibang yuchwi* was put to various uses. One example is *Changjinjip* (*Book on Smallpox and Measles* 瘡疹集), a specialized medical book containing knowledge of the more urgently needed areas that was published while the massive volume of medical texts continued to be compiled for *Uibang yuchwi*. According to the foreword of *Changjinjip*, contents related to illnesses with skin rashes (*changjin*) such as smallpox or measles were culled and bound separately into a book while *Uibang yuchwi* was being compiled (Kim 2010, 13). *Uibang yuchwi* may have been used in clinical settings as the following entry suggests.

The king summoned the magistrate (*buyun* 府尹) Bak Yeon, the drafter (*eunggyo* 應教) Kim Yemong, and the compiler (*suchan* 修撰) Yu Seongwon, and had them carefully examine medical books in the Palace Pharmacy for seven days.<sup>55</sup>

On the day of the entry above, Sejong moves to the residence of Grand Prince Hyoryeong due to his illness and dies two months later,<sup>56</sup> which may explain why he had Bak Yeon, Kim Yemong, and Yu Seongwon consult medical texts. Bak Yeon was an instructor (*hundogwan* 訓導官) that taught royal female physicians (*uinyeo* 醫女) at the Relief Agency<sup>57</sup> and had also been sent to China along with No Jungrye to verify medicinal ingredients. Interestingly, however, none of the individuals Sejong ordered to examine medical texts are physicians. It should be noted that Kim Yemong and Yu Seongwon participated in the first

stage of the compilation of *Uibang yuchwi*. A medical text as extensive as to have these three figures examine for seven days in the Palace Pharmacy was likely one of massive length—hence, *Uibang yuchwi*. Bak Yeon, Kim Yemong, and Yu Seongwon were probably sent to find the appropriate cure for Sejong's illness.

What had Sejong originally intended by the compilation of medical texts if the use of *Uibang yuchwi* would end up being so limited? As I have mentioned before, there is no foreword or afterword explaining the circumstances leading up to the compilation and publication of *Uibang yuchwi*; only a few explanatory notes outlining the general process exist. We should therefore approach *Uibang yuchwi* by looking at its overall composition rather than focusing on understanding the specific contents, particularly considering how *Uibang yuchwi* was assembled by selecting and categorizing the contents of preexisting medical texts for each disease category.<sup>58</sup>

The first thing that stands out in the Table of Contents of *Uibang yuchwi* is that a lengthy essay on the path to becoming a physician appears before anything else.

All those desiring to become an eminent physician must know by heart the following: *Suwen* 素問,<sup>59</sup> *Jiayi* 甲乙,<sup>60</sup> *Huangdi zhen jing* 黃帝鍼經, Mingtang 明堂, *Liu zhu* 流注,<sup>61</sup> the twelve meridians 十二經脈, the three parts and nine pulse takings 三部九候, the five viscera and six bowels 五臟六腑, the exterior and interior of the body, and the orifices and acupoints 表裏孔穴, the *Materia Medica* (*Bencao* 本草) and *Yaodui* (*Guide to Material Medica* 藥對); and medical texts across a wide range of fields by Zhang Zhongjing 張仲景, Wang Shuhe 王叔和, Ruan Henan 阮河南, Fan Dongyang 范東陽, Zhang Miao 張苗, and Jin Shao 靳邵. They must also have a deep understanding of the methods of divination 祿命法 of the school of *yin* and *yang* 陰陽家, and the various schools of physiognomy 觀相法; and they must also

58. Seongjong did not have a foreword or afterword written when publishing the total of 266 volumes of *Uibang yuchwi*, probably in order to be faithful to the original text compiled during Sejong's reign. It would thus be safe to assume that the version of *Uibang yuchwi* published during Seongjong is in essence identical with the version compiled under Sejong.

59. Originally titled *Huangdi neijing suwen* (*Basic Question of the Yellow Emperor's Inner Cannon* 黃帝內經 素問).

60. Originally titled *Zhenjiu Jiayijing* (*A-B Classics of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* 鍼灸甲乙經).

61. Possibly referring to *Huangdi liu zhu mai jing* 黃帝流注脈經 which appears to be a book on acupuncture and moxibustion.

54. *Sejongillok*, *gwon* 60, 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1433.

55. *Sejongillok*, *gwon* 127, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> lunar month, 1450.

56. *Sejongillok*, *gwon* 127, 17<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> lunar month, 1450.

57. *Sejongillok*, *gwon* 19, 17<sup>th</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lunar month, 1423.

master the arts of divination by plastronomy 灼龜 and the five signs 五兆, and the arts of divination by *Zhou's Book of Changes* 周易 and the six *ren* heavenly stems 六壬. Only then can they become great physicians. If they do not do so, they will be no different from those walking at night with their eyes closed, falling over whenever they try to move. They must next read this book closely, devoting themselves to studying and contemplating its deep meanings; only then can they converse about the way of medicine 道理 together. Furthermore, they must be well versed in a wide range of texts. Why is this? If they do not read the Five Confucian Classics 五經, they cannot know of the way of benevolence and righteousness; if they do not read the Three Histories 三史, they cannot know the events of the past; if they do not read the writings of the many masters of philosophy 諸子, they will be unable to grasp any event that occurs; if they do not read Buddhist scriptures, they will not know of the virtues of compassion and sacrifice; if they do not read the writings of Zhuangzi 莊子 and Laozi 老子, they cannot make as their own the ways of the truth and will instead be constrained and blocked by predictions of good and ill fortune in whatever they do. They must even delve into the field of astronomy such as the movement of the five phases 五行 and the seven luminaries 七耀. Only when they learn all of the above will their medical arts proceed smoothly and become of utmost greatness and utmost beauty.<sup>62</sup>

The excerpt cited above lists the things one must master to become a venerated physician as written in the beginning of *Qianjin fang* 千金方, originally titled *Beiji Qianjin Yaofang* (*Essential Formulas Worth a Thousand Gold for Emergencies* 備急千金要方), written by Sun Simiao 孫思邈, the renowned physician during the Tang dynasty. Following this, *Uibang yuchwi* continues to cite *Qianjin fang* and writes of the mind-set one must maintain to be a good physician 論大醫精誠, outlines the treatment of diseases, and narrates the methods of medical examination and prescription. This is then followed the discussion of the path to becoming a doctor and the principles of medicine as written in *Taiping shenghuifang and Heji jufang* (*Great Peace Imperial Pharmacy's Formulary* 和劑局方), which are medical texts of the Song dynasty.

One thing to note here is that *Qianjin fang* is virtually the only medical text that presents such a treatise—in essence the introduction—on these aforementioned themes at the very front. Such themes barely make an appearance in *Taiping shenghuifang*, and even where it does, there is no comprehensive discussion of the range of knowledge a physician should have, or of the ethics and attitude a person practicing medicine should maintain towards illness. Even *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, which was compiled before *Uibang yuchwi*, does not have what would amount to an introduction. The compilers of *Uibang yuchwi*, in other words, departed from the precedent and placed the contents of *Qianjin fang* at the very front as its introduction.

The most plausible explanation behind this remarkably unusual composition *Uibang yuchwi* chose of creating a separate introduction section is that it was also the influence of Sejong's visions regarding the field of medicine. Without even a foreword or afterword to base our assumptions on, this composition give us a clue as to where the aims of the compilation of medical texts lay: *Uibang yuchwi* was compiled to present a way to raise great physicians by arguing that aspirants not only had to put their efforts into learning the basics of medicine but should also master a wide range of other studies beyond medicine as well.

This was an issue directly related to the problems raised of the field of medicine during the earlier years of Joseon. Rearing medical scholars and securing medical texts containing the most advanced medical theories for their education was absolutely necessary to advance medicine. The shortage of educated physicians in reality, however, had already been pointed out several times even during the reign of Taejong. Taejong stated in 1415 that “physicians of today do not know medical texts well,” and criticized even the most trusted physicians at that time such as Yang Hongdal 楊弘達 or Jo Cheong 曹聽 for being guilty of the same fault.<sup>63</sup>

Such criticism was possible since Taejong had always been keenly attuned to the problems medicine potentially harbored. For example, he looked up the definition of children as defined in medical texts after witnessing a child being given the same dosage of medicine as an adult, and he pointed out the lack of study and research of the materia medica by referring to Psoraleae Semen

62. “Lun da yi xi ye” (On the Practice of the Eminent Physician 論大醫習業) in *Qianjin fang*, as cited in “Introduction” 總論, *Uibang yuchwi*, *gwon* 1.

63. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 29, 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> lunar month, 1415.

破古紙.<sup>64</sup> Two months after this incident, he orders the Superintendent of Medicine (*uihak jejo* 醫學提調) to find out how the physicians are going about with their studying, to which the Superintendent answers that the study of medicine should begin with and be based on the study of the materia medica due to its importance.<sup>65</sup>

The circumstances are not much different in Sejong's reign, as the following report made by the Ministry of Rites to the State Council shows.

Since physicians do not learn the medical books from their teachers but study them individually, they are unable to comprehend the profound meanings within them and have narrow and parochial knowledge. Those who have mastered the Classics, on the other hand, scorn the practice of medical skills and do not desire to make it their calling. Our concern is that the practice of medicine will become lost.<sup>66</sup>

According to the entry above, physicians merely studied medical texts by themselves without a teacher to guide them. Such an unsystematic way of learning, however, cannot maintain a consistent school of thought taught and practiced and thereby makes it difficult to produce good physicians. In a society where miscellaneous technical studies were regarded with contempt while only studying Confucianism was esteemed, hardly anyone, let alone someone who had mastered the Confucian Classics, would have felt particularly pressed to devote themselves to the study of medicine. The solution put forth by the Ministry of Rites was thus to appoint Confucian scholars as instructors to aid the study of medical texts while appointing physicians equipped with medicinal knowledge to handle diagnosis and prescriptions—that is, a dual system of putting Confucian scholars in charge of the foundational studies and physicians in charge of clinical practice.

Sejong also displays a degree of distrust towards the physicians who were served during his reign for the same reasons as the entry quoted above. The 1445 entry below is quite significant in this respect.

The king issued the following order to the Ministry of Rites. “The physicians of our country do not have precise knowledge of the medical arts: when diagnosing a person's illness, they do not carefully consult medical texts and instead rashly determine by themselves that there is nothing wrong, thereby harming the person's life. From now on, they are not to carelessly and indiscreetly conclude that there is nothing wrong after examining [the patient] and instead must consult medical texts meticulously and be more careful in their treatment.”<sup>67</sup>

To put it simply, the physicians of Joseon, according to Sejong, did not study or practice medicine carefully enough. A major problem was how they did not consult medical texts when examining patients or prescribing medicine and instead recklessly asserted their own opinions. Sejong's ordinance was not only an analysis of the present state of clinical practice; he was also proposing the direction relevant policies should pursue to improve medicine and medical practice in Joseon. Physicians were to pursue higher standards in their studies of medicine—the most pressing issue—and medical texts were to be consulted during clinical practice.

*Uibang yuchwi*, the compilation of which begins five months later, reflects this vision of Sejong as shown below, which is part of the principles of treating diseases as written by Sun Simiao.

The physicians of today appear to have little intention of studying the true meanings of medical texts to expand their own knowledge. Each merely continue the way of practicing medicine as passed down within their own households, and from beginning to end, only follow the old and obsolete way of doing things. They put their efforts only in making do with some words when diagnosing the patients and prescribe decoctions right away after only briefly examining them.<sup>68</sup>

The cautionary message in this excerpt is thus not to stop at simply reading revered medical Classics such as *Suwen* or *Nanjing* but to seek their true meaning and expand one's knowledge, and also to strictly consult medical texts

64. “破古紙,” as written in records, refers to the medicinal ingredient 補骨脂.

65. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 29, 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lunar month, 1415.

66. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 90, 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1440.

67. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 108, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1445.

68. “Lun zhi bin glue li” (On the Treatment of Disease through Simple Examples 論治病略例) in *Qianjin fang*, as cited in “Introduction” 總論, *Uibang yuchwi*, *gwon* 1.

when treating patients. Sejong knew the importance of this all too well from his experience participating in the treatment of his younger brother, Grand Prince Seongnyeong 誠寧大君, together with the physicians back when he was still Grand Prince Chungnyeong 忠寧大君.<sup>69</sup> Taejong initially did not wish to punish the physicians after the death of Grand Prince Seongnyeong, but after finding out for himself that the cause of death was the ill-judged treatment prescribed by the physicians who had not carefully consulted the medical books, he orders the State Tribunal (Uigeumbu 義禁府) to lock them all up.<sup>70</sup> This whole affair, which Sejong would have experienced firsthand, likely led to the value he placed on the practice of medicine based strictly on medical texts.

In addition to the expansion of medical knowledge and the precautions to be taken during medical practice, Sejong also focused on the sense of ethics physicians should carry. His predecessors had emphasized the importance of treating the sick upon request regardless of the high and low of their social status; Sejong, however, goes a step further and decrees that this principle should extend to prisoners locked up in jail as well.<sup>71</sup> This attitude is reflected in *Uibang yuchwi*.

A great physician must compose his thoughts and calm his mind, and must not desire or seek anything. He must do his utmost to be merciful and compassionate, and he must pledge to relieve the suffering of people far and wide. If a sick person comes and seeks help, he must treat them all equally as if treating an intimate friend regardless of whether that person is of high or lowly birth, rich or poor, old or young, beautiful or ugly, friend or foe, or Chinese or barbarian.<sup>72</sup>

As the excerpt above shows, the contents of *Qianjin fang* on medical ethics were included in *Uibang yuchwi* as well. The cited guidelines emphasized taking to medical practice thoughtfully with a merciful attitude without discriminating between the birth or wealth of the person, how close their relationship was, or

where they came from. Such ethical guidelines were tricky to cover in medical books compiled by individuals; they were, in fact, aspects usually emphasized from the position of supervising or managing physicians.<sup>73</sup> It was thus only right that *Uibang yuchwi*, a state-lead project, deal with the subject, particularly as it was a crucial issue in state health policies that aimed to practice the way of governing based on love towards the people.

In sum, the goals of compiling medical texts, as evident in *Uibang yuchwi*, and the directions Sejong envisioned for the improvement of the health system were largely threefold: first, to improve the way physicians were studying through the compilation, research, and distribution of medical texts; second, to implement accurate, text-based medical treatment; and third, to strengthen the sense of ethics of physicians.

## Conclusion

Having inherited a powerful kingship thanks to Taejong's political savvy and consideration, Sejong actively sought to solve the long-standing problems within the health system. The most pressing issue was to streamline the practice of medicine and strengthen its aspect of providing health care to the people, thus fulfilling the ideology of governing based on love for people, the political stance taken by the new class of scholar-officials that had led the founding of Joseon. As I have shown in this article, Sejong tackled this issue by building a system that could efficiently operate within a medieval government, and by raising the standards expected of medical personnel. He sought to systematically expand the use of domestic medicinal ingredients, a practical and realistic solution for Joseon, and find a way to secure the basis of the ingredients' production and supply that could work with the tax system.

Advancing the standards of medicine, on the other hand, culminated into the compilation of various medical texts. Sejong went beyond simply distributing traditional medical texts since Goryeo such as *Gugeupbang* and the like, and sought to compile a fully developed, comprehensive medical text

69. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 35, 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> lunar month, 1418.

70. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 35, 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1418.

71. *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 17, 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> lunar month, 1409; *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 29, 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lunar month, 1415; *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 51, 19<sup>th</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lunar month, 1431.

72. "Lun da yi xi ye" (On the Practice of the Eminent Physician 論大醫習業) in *Qianjin fang*, as cited in "Introduction" 總論, *Uibang yuchwi*, *gwon* 1.

73. *Sejo sillok*, *gwon* 31, 27<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 1463. The stance taken in *Uibang yuchwi* is also closely related to the *Uiyangnon* (*Treatise on Medicine* 醫藥論) Sejo personally writes and distributes in 1463.



that would be distributed and used for education. When pushing ahead amidst opposing voices with the compilation of *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, a medical text utilizing only domestic medicinal ingredients, he actively employed the scholars of the Hall of Worthies, the future leaders of the country whom he greatly trusted, to get his intentions across and fulfill his visions.

Sejong's plans are particularly evident in the compilation process of *Uibang yuchwi*. Despite certain limits such as the method of simply gathering previous medical texts and classifying the contents under defined categories, *Uibang yuchwi* newly included an introduction section and proposed the expansion of learning, text-based medical practice, and the strengthening of ethics under the overall agenda of improving the quality of physicians.

Ultimately, the compilation of *Hyangyak jipseongbang* and *Uibang yuchwi* under Sejong were not simply projects of compiling medical texts; they were a vision bearing on the entire health policies Joseon should continue to pursue in the future. Sejong's visions of advancing and raising the standards of medicine finally comes to fruition in *Dongui bogam* (*Treasured Mirror of Eastern Medicine* 東醫寶鑑) written by Heo Jun 許浚. In this sense, Sejong should be reevaluated as a figure who accurately perceived the reality of the health system in Joseon and envisioned a new way medicine should pursue.

Translated by Jong Woo PARK and Boram SEO

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## Abstract

The forces that led the founding of Joseon focused on medicine as a way of realizing neo-Confucian ideals of government. Medicine thus had to be reorganized to meet new societal needs: 1) to increase accessibility to medical services in line with the neo-Confucian ideal of providing medical care to the people, and 2) to actually advance the field of medicine by way of academic research. King Sejong set out to systematically implement specific plans to resolve the long-standing problems surrounding medicine and medical care. He focused his efforts on restructuring various medical agencies in line with symbolizing the authority of the throne and ensuring the state's provision of medical care to carry out the spirit of loving the people. In order to raise the standard of medical care, Sejong put his efforts into planning and compiling comprehensive medical texts as well as distributing the books and encouraging their use in education. One of these was *Hyangyak jipseongbang*, a text covering medicine using only domestic medicinal ingredients; and another was *Uibang yuchwi*, which presented in its introduction the direction towards which the field of medicine in Joseon should strive to proceed—academically rigorous learning, medical-text-based clinical practice, and high ethical standards of all medical personnel. Sejong's visions formed the foundation of the health system of Joseon, which would lead to the publication of *Dongui bogam* more than 200 years later.

**Keywords:** Sejong, *hyangyak*, *Uibang yuchwi*, medical personnel, health system

